

LXX Judith: Removing the fourth wall



Authors:

Nicholas P.L. Allen¹ 

Pierre J. Jordaan¹ 

Affiliations:

¹School of Ancient Languages and Text Studies, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Nicholas Allen,
shroudallen@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 28 Oct. 2022

Accepted: 04 Jan. 2023

Published: 19 Apr. 2023

How to cite this article:

Allen, N.P.L. & Jordaan, P.J., 2023, 'LXX Judith: Removing the fourth wall', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(2), a8252. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8252>

Copyright:

© 2023. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Given the strong mimetic and dramatic qualities found in Judith the authors make the suggestion that perhaps, before LXX Judith became a fixed, written text, the basic fabula might well have been part of an oral tradition. The authors accept that an appropriately written dramatic work, whether transmitted through reading or an oral presentation, by means of its performative qualities, has the potential to achieve immediacy. Here, the audience may become captivated with its own familiarity and memory of popular, communally shared narratives. Accordingly, this article attempts to find evidence in the Greek text of LXX Judith for a possible oral precursor. In this context, corroboration is sought for the employment of verbal aspect and mood of the Greek language as well as instances of drama, theatrics, bodily gestures, mnemonic devices or special emphasis on the employment of the senses such as sight, taste and smell. The authors suggest that based on an analysis of the text of Chapter 13, there is much circumstantial evidence for the Judith fabula once being an oral narrative – one that embodies the dramatic and even encourages audience participation. This characteristic strongly suggests the removal of the fourth wall – the notion of an imaginary boundary between any fictional work and its audience.

Contribution: This article shows that Judith 13 is indeed the climax of the narrative. However, it goes further. It is a vivid scene with various performative aspects. There are props, dialogue and audience participation. This research is cutting-edge and paves the way for new explorations.

Keywords: oral tradition; fourth wall; LXX Judith; dramatic irony; righteousness.

Background to the problem

Biblical Performance Criticism (BPC) offers a unique lens through which to view certain narratives in the Septuagint. As Peter S. Perry confirms, BPC is the result of the convergence of numerous disciplines, including form criticism, narrative criticism, media studies, memory studies, oral-tradition studies, performance studies and rhetorical criticism (Perry 2016:1). In the case of Judith, form criticism, oral-tradition studies and also literary imitation would surely seem to have shed the most light. Here we are informed by the seminal work of Lawrence Wills who correctly expounds on, inter alia, the immense intertextuality of the book of Judith (Wills 2019:33). We duly recognise these epistemes as useful methodological precursors. However, in this article we primarily focus on orality.

The known role of literary imitation (mimesis)

For example, it is already well-known that the book of Judith as found in the LXX, makes good use of mimesis. John Van Seters (2000:395–409) reminds us of the five assumptions of literary imitation or mimesis, as originally identified by Russell (1980:16):

- Select an archetype that is worth imitating
- Imitate the spirit rather than the letter
- Ensure that the imitation contains subtle references as regards its inspiration, for the benefit of the more learned reader or audience
- Personalise the imitation, such that it successfully exhibits its own literary setting and significance
- Attempt (as far as possible) to compete with the archetype.

Intertextuality

Certainly, when analysing, inter alia, the performative aspects of LXX Judith, apart from its mimetic qualities, one is always aware of its glaring and obvious intertextuality. Here, both literary imitation and intertextuality operate on many levels.

Note: HTS Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Based on our reading of the Greek text, we are inclined to believe that this attribute plays an important role as regards gaining informed insights into the cultural values and worldview of the reader or listening audience. On this issue, Venter (2011) confirms that:

[T]he trend in general linguistics obviously accommodates the role of the reader in the intertextual process. Not only literary techniques, but especially the ideological stance of the reader should be kept in mind. (p. 2)

Of course, Judith's intertextuality has been the subject of numerous investigations. As confirmed by Nickelsburg (2005):

The story combines features of a number of biblical stories, and Judith is the personification of several Israelite heroines: Miriam (Ex 15:20–21), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4–5), the woman of Thebez (Jdg 9:53–54), and the woman of Abel-beth-maacah (2 Sm 20:14–22). Her deed also recalls the story of David and Goliath (1 Sm 17:12–54), and the book of Judith as a whole is a kind of reversal of the story of the rape of Dinah (Jdt 9:2–4, 8–10; cf. Gn 34). (p. 100)

At a slight stretch, Judith could also be compared with the woman from Tekoa (2 Sm 14:2–19) and even Susanna (Dn 13). Gert J. Steyn (with reference to Coleman 1932:58–60) proffers that not only the personality of Queen Esther (Es 1–10) but also the description of Jerusalem as the virgin daughter of Zion, most likely contributed to the final character of Judith (cf. Steyn 2008:156–181).

Perhaps the greatest similarity is to be found with Jael – so much so, that one mid-twentieth century scholar even trustingly believed them to be one and the same historical individual (cf. Bruns 1954:12–14). Certainly, from both a literary and dramatic perspective the account of Jael and Sisera's relationship in Judges 4:18–21 and 5:24–27 is remarkably similar to that given for Judith and Holofernes in Judith 12 and 13. Again, Pseudo-Philo's account of Jael and Sisera confirms that the Jewish deity's brand of justice demands that the transgressions of wicked individuals are revenged for in kind (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, xxi:1–9). The three offences of Sisera are answered by three analogous (albeit ironic) punishments (Table 1).

Ironically, it is the women, to whom Sisera poses the greatest threat, and it is a single woman who will see to his downfall. Exactly like Sisera, Holofernes suffers a retributive as well as ironic fate for his wrongdoings.

Historical employment exploiting Judith's dramatic elements

By its intrinsic intertextual and even extratextual references plus heightened mimesis, LXX Judith has been successfully employed as a performance text over the past two millennia. LXX Judith not only makes use of similar ironies contained in other traditional texts (intertextuality) it also contains an element of playful humour. In this context, Esler (2002) even describes Judith as being 'ludic' in quality

TABLE 1: Overview of Sisera's ironic punishments based on information found in Judges and LAB XXXI: 1–9.

Offence against the Jewish deity	Corresponding punishment
Sisera intends to attack Israel with a mighty army plus 900 chariots (Jdg 4:2–3, 13).	A single [weak] woman attacks Sisera (Jdg 4:9b).
Sisera intends to divide the spoils of the Israelites amongst his soldiers (Jdg 5:30).	Sisera's entire army is destroyed. Hence, only the victorious Israelites would be able to divide the spoils (implied).
Sisera intends to take and violate beautiful women (Jdg 5:30).	A single Israelite woman violates and kills Sisera (Jdg 4:21; and 5:26).

(pp. 117, 121). And, of course, LXX Judith, like other examples of early Jewish literature, delights in portraying its enemies as being foolish and acting in compromising ways (cf. Jdt 13:1).

The fabula of LXX Judith and its later derivatives have served as powerful propaganda on many occasions during the past 1500 years, including:

- An allegory of the Catholic Church as the 'true faith' during the Counter Reformation (cf. Ciletti 2010: 345–368).
- A validation for the right of Quaker women to preach in the 17th century (cf. Bartholomew 2010:259–270).
- As a symbol of nationalistic fervour during the unification of Italy (cf. Bernardini 2010:397–409).
- The tale of Judith has been thoroughly exploited as a theme for numerous paintings and sculptures (cf. Allen & Jordaan 2020:1–2; Burzlaff 2006:1–72; Gash 2015:378; Kleiner 2019:666, 691–692, 725–727; Kubiak 1965:1–87; Wills 2021:62–63), and oratorios and plays (cf. Harness 2010:371–383; Marsh 2010:385–396; Wills 2019:153).

Oral-tradition studies and the role of drama

Propp supports the view that the art of narration and dramatic performance operates with an 'oral epic style'. This is an ensemble, whose various components encapsulate the key attributes of a culture (Propp 1968:ixx). In this context, Robin Gallaher Branch and Pierre Johan Jordaan confirm that the stories of Susanna, Judith, and the Additions to Esther provide insights into both the thinking and associated worldviews that characterise the Jewish people (Branch & Jordaan 2009:393).

With reference to Perry (2016)'s seminal work: *Insights from Performance Criticism*, the authors also recognise the important role of the values and worldviews of the inferred Jewish audience¹ when attempting to ratiocinate the 'premeditated' import of the text (Allen & Jordaan 2020:2–5). Undeniably, given the strong mimetic and dramatic qualities found in LXX Judith, we are led to confirm the assumption that before it became a fixed, written text (i.e. the 'original' LXX Judith), the fabula of Judith may well have been part of an oral tradition. If so, this dramatic narrative would have constantly metamorphosed depending on who recited or

¹We employ the term 'audience' to indicate a reader of the text and person listening to the narrative being read or performed by a third party.

performed the tale. By their very nature, oral narratives have to embody the dramatic. A storyteller will naturally make use of body language, mimetic gestures, pithy memorable and formulaic sayings and mime.

Oral tradition, also called orality, was the first and still is the most widespread mode of human communication. Typically, an oral tradition will employ a vigorous and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas. It is typically contrasted with literacy, with which it can and does interact in countless ways, and also with literature, which it dwarfs in size, diversity and social function.

By way of a more recent example, by the 1930s, Milman Parry and Albert Lord had conducted their famous, wide-ranging fieldwork on oral tradition in the former Yugoslavia. They recorded more than 1500 orally performed epic poems in an effort to determine how stories that often reached thousands of lines in length could be recalled and performed by individuals who could neither read nor write. What they found was that these poets employed a highly systematic form of expression, a special oral language of formulaic phrases, typical scenes, and story patterns that enabled their mnemonic and artistic activities (cf. Bartók & Lord 1951; Edwards 1983:151–169; Parry 1971:passim; Sale 1996:374–377).

We also take note of, inter alia, the study by Helmer Ringgren. He studied the Hebrew Bible to determine whether the small differences that exist between the texts can be traced to written or oral transmission. As some of the differences appear to be errors in hearing, he urges that one should allow for oral as well as written transmission (Ringgren 1949:34–59).

The more fluid and often less formal, oral transmission of information has been and still is the most common means of communication in any society. Typically, any information that is transmitted from generation to generation (*L'dor v'dor* as it is repeatedly termed in Hebrew) becomes oral tradition (cf. Gn 9:12; 17:7, 9; Ex 3:15; 12:17 etc.). This may be further sub-divided into memorised information, which is distinguishable from everyday speech, including, but not limited to, poetry, songs and prayers.

In this context, we make the cautious assumption that throughout their long history, the Judahite people engaged in such things as oral storytelling, public performance and play acting. The problem is that we do not have any direct, hard evidence for this conjecture. What we do know is that in most literate societies oral tradition and written literature are related phenomena, and in fact, writing often supports oral tradition and vice versa.

Problem statement defined

The question now arises: 'Are there any vestiges of orality in the written Greek version of the Judith fabula?' In short, did

the author and/or final redactor of LXX Judith retain (albeit unconsciously) even subtle references to such things as drama, theatrics, gestures, mnemonic devices or special emphasis on the employment of the senses such as sight, taste and smell?

If Judith was indeed written down after a period of strict orality, is there any evidence of its former characteristics in the written Greek version? Furthermore, if evidence of its performative and dramatic qualities still underpin the written version is there enough evidence to support the assumption that it was originally communicated via formulaic, mnemonic devices (including short, pithy and/or ironic figures of speech)?

This will be a scientific investigation and will vehemently eschew any fideist concepts. Where substantiated and datable texts are available, a post-foundationalist and/or coherentist epistemology will be favoured. Where data have to be reconstructed from multiple sources, the employment of an interpretivist and constructivist epistemology appears to be the most beneficial approach. Certainly, because of the dearth of datable textual references, where applicable, some focus will need to be given to recorded social life interactions and the meaning of these collaborations as perceived by certain individuals. Here, we accept that societies construct their own independent realities and further that they are capable of projecting these perceived realities onto other societies.

Methodological approach

With direct reference to the original Greek, we are keen to expose the following:

- Evidence of recontextualisation of the 'text' according to prevailing conditions of the current social, political, and/or religious environment. According to Wills (2019:16) the book was written between the end of the 2nd century BCE and the beginning of the 1st century BCE. However, it is impossible to determine the precise historical and sociological background.
- Evidence of the employment of verbal aspect and mood of the Greek language, including: the use of the aorist indicative to denote a simple action in the past; the use of the aorist participle to denote a preceding action; the employment of an aorist imperative to show an immediate action; and a present imperative to show a progued action.
- Evidence of the employment of drama, for example, costume, register of speech, inflections of voice, gestures, facial expressions, props etc.

We will limit ourselves to LXX Judith 13, which we, like Wills (2019:339), accept as the climax of the entire tale. In that regard, we acknowledge that a sound awareness of the events portrayed earlier in the book would be imperative to fully appreciating the contexts and import of Judith 13.

Reading Judith 13 as a dramatic performance

It would take several hours to read or perform the whole book of Judith. In this regard, Chapters 1–7 contain important background information. It sets the scene for an ironic response by its anticipatory nature.

As already accepted, Chapter 13 is the climax of LXX Judith. It should be seen as highly significant that its narrative alone would be most suitable for a stage play or dramatic, oral performance, replete with two scenes of equal length, each of which could be divided into several acts.

Scene 1: Holofernes' tent

Scene 1 commences with the close of the day. Evening comes *ὡς δὲ ὀψία ἐγένετο* (dramatic visually) and there is a great emphasis at this juncture that all actions are designed to ensure that ultimately, the chief antagonist and protagonist of the tale will be left alone within the tent (Jdt 13:1).

Holofernes' slaves leave quickly (*ἐσπούδασαν*) and Holofernes' sidekick, Bagoas physically closes up the tent from the outside (*καὶ Βαγώας συνέκλεισε τὴν σκηνὴν ἔξωθεν*) (Jdt 13:1). The text informs the reader that Judith had previously sent her servant outside to wait and keep watch (Jdt 13:3). Consequently, the audience are now very aware that Judith is finally, quite alone with her nemesis and archenemy, Holofernes, within the constricted space of the tent (*ὑπελείφθη δὲ Ἰουδίθ μόνη ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ*) (Jdt 13:2).

Notice that the term 'σκηνῇ' bolsters the association of the tent interior with a Greek stage setting. The text of reiterates the important fact that Judith is alone with Holofernes:

καὶ ἀπήλθοσαν πάντες ἐκ προσώπου, καὶ οὐδεὶς κατελείφθη ἐν τῷ κοιτῶνι ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου. And everyone has left and no one was left behind in the bedroom from small to big. [Jdt 13:4a]

It is noteworthy that the tent has now become a bedroom. The audience now become voyeurs of a private and restricted boudoir scene (Jdt 13:4). In this regard also see Wills (2019:340).

Most importantly, by her very stance, Judith is depicted as being in command of her senses while Holofernes lies on the bed, helpless, unprotected and in a drunken stupor (*καὶ Ὀλοφέρνης προπετωκῶς ἐπὶ τὴν κλίνην αὐτοῦ ἦν γὰρ περικεχυμένος αὐτῷ ὁ οἶνος*). Judith is standing upright and obviously in control – symbolic of her righteousness. Holofernes is lying prone, out of control – symbolic of his wickedness. Here is a conceptual metaphor that, taken from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics (where moral questions may be viewed from the perspective of one's bodily experience with gravity), strongly suggests that Judith is occupying the moral high ground (upright) while Holofernes (prone) is in lower domain signifying moral decay (Jdt 13:2, 4 and 6) (cf., Johnson 1987: passim; Nathan 2007:627).

From the audience or reader's perspective, the archenemy of the Jews is made to look derisible. There is both an element of humour and irony here. After all, was not this the same man who only shortly before in Judith 12:12, boasted that he would sleep with Judith? It must be assumed that the audience would have known the important details of the preceding chapters in LXX Judith. Indeed, the humour of this book relies heavily on the audience's great familiarity with the fabula. They would recall that earlier Holofernes admitted that he would appear foolish if he let this golden opportunity slip through his fingers:

παθ ἰδοὺ γὰρ αἰσχρὸν τῷ προσώπῳ ἡμῶν, εἰ γυναῖκα τοιαύτην παρήσομεν οὐχ ὀμλήσαντες αὐτῇ, ὅτι ἐὰν ταύτην μὴ ἐπισπασώμεθα, καταγελάσεται ἡμῶν. For, lo, it will be a shame for our person, if we shall let such a woman go, not having had her company; for if we draw her not unto us, she will laugh us to scorn. [Jdt 12:12]

Holofernes, the great Assyrian general, the macho man sent by king Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Jewish nation lies immobile on his bed – quite unable to engage in sexual relations with Judith. The graphic description of the ironic, reversal of roles, alludes to physical comedy.

It is also significant at this stage that Judith, empowered by her long prayer in Judith 9:1–14, has always been depicted (up to this point) as supremely confident in her actions (because of the fact that she is righteous in the eyes of her deity and is thus automatically empowered by her godliness) (cf. Allen 2016:17–44). Yet, in the midst of her highly successful operations, she suddenly feels the need to both inform her deity of her uprightness as well as confirm her intentions:

κύριε ὁ θεὸς πάσης δυνάμεως ἐπίβλεπον ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ταύτῃ ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν μου εἰς ὑψωμα Ἱερουσαλημ. ὅτι νῦν καιρὸς ἀντιλαβέσθαι τῆς κληρονομίας σου καὶ ποιῆσαι τὸ ἐπιτήδευμά μου εἰς θραῦσμα ἐχθρῶν οἱ ἐπανεστήσαν ἡμῖν. Ὁ Lord, God of all might, in this hour look graciously on the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. Now is the time for aiding your heritage and for carrying out my design to shatter the enemies who have risen against us. [Jdt 13:4b–5]

Indeed, Judith alerts her deity to the fact that she is about to fulfil her self-directed, albeit holy, mission. Here, the Jewish deity is requested to observe what she is about to do with her virtuous hands. Then, just as she is about to strike off the head of Holofernes, she quite uncharacteristically makes a plea for divine strength (Jdt 13:7b). However, this is an extremely short, to-the-point entreaty and not some long-winded exaltation as one finds:

κραταίωσόν με, ὁ Θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ! Strengthen me this day, Lord, God of Israel! [Additions to Esther 14:3–19]

The Greek 'κραταίωσόν' is written in the aorist imperative tense, which denotes an immediate action. This is a dramatic interlude where the reader may well ask 'Is Judith going to fail after all?' 'Why only now does she seem so unsure of herself?' Simultaneously, the audience are also looking at her actions. They are what is called 'a compassionate audience'.

They would also want Judith to succeed² and indisputably, they do not have to wait long to see Judith accomplish her self-appointed task.

The text makes it clear that Judith (albeit being a woman) strikes off the head of Holofernes *solely* with her own strength. The following text emphasises this fact by requiring her to make two attempts to separate Holofernes' head from his body:

καὶ ἐπάταξεν εἰς τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ δις ἐν τῇ ἰσχύϊ αὐτῆς καὶ ἀφείλε τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. And she struck at his throat twice and with her own power cut his head from him [Jdt 13:8]

The aorist indicatives 'ἐπάταξεν' and 'ἀφείλε' denote simple actions in the past and seem to emphasise the brevity of the time spent in completing them. However, this does not take away the fact that two blows were needed to complete the action. Had Judith cut off his head with but one chop of the sword, the reader would have been far less impressed by her actions. Here the performative qualities come to the fore. It is clear, that although she is acting in a godly way because of her righteousness and rigid observance of *halakhah*, she is solely reliant on her own physical strength to carry out her deity's will.

Next (Jdt 13:9a), Judith rolls the headless body off the bed (καὶ ἀπεκύλισε τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς στρωμνῆς) – possibly to amplify the fact that she now has absolute power over Holofernes.

She removes the canopy and hands over the head to her servant (Jdt 13:9b). Note, it is the servant who places the head into the wallet and not Judith. This possibly signifies that by Judith's actions, the other members of her community are also empowered. Here the audience would pick up on the point that righteous behaviour empowers the entire community – which they represent.

The interlude

At this juncture there is a need for a change of scenery – a short intermission between scenes, as it were. Here, Judith and her servant are quickly described as leaving the enemy camp, walking around a valley, ascending a hill and arriving at the city gates of Bethulia. All of this is performed furtively, secretly, under cover of darkness. The reader is aware, through the descriptive text that the scene has changed and something new will soon replace it:

...καὶ διελθοῦσαι τὴν παρεμβολὴν ἐκύκλωσαν τὴν φάλαγγα ἐκεῖνην καὶ προσανέβησαν τὸ ὄρος Βαιτυλοῦα καὶ ἦλθοσαν πρὸς τὰς πόλας αὐτῆς. ...and having passed the camp, they compassed the valley, and went up the mountain of Bethulia, and came to the gates thereof. [Jdt 13:10b]

This interlude is covered by the aorist participle διελθοῦσαι 'having passed through'. This denotes a preceding action,

²It is certain that most of the audience already know that Judith will succeed and would surely have taken delight in the iteration of that fact.

which is followed by the main verb ἦλθοσαν 'they came to'. The brevity of the main actions stands out. The idea communicated here is that not much time was wasted in the progression from Scene 1 to Scene 2.

Scene 2: The city gates (Bethulia)

Scene 2 is set in the nighttime. Judith and her servant are alone before the city gates. Judith 13:11a reveals that Judith cries out from afar 'μακρόθεν'. We add here 'so that everyone can hear' because that is surely what 'μακρόθεν' from afar is trying to achieve. Next in Judith 13:11b, we take note of the words 'open, open the gate immediately!' (ἀνοίξατε ἀνοίξατε δὴ τὴν πόλιν). Be aware of the emphatic article 'δὴ' and the repetition of the aorist imperative 'ἀνοίξατε', which denotes an immediate action. Judith not only requests the guards to open the gate but also manages to give an oral précis and a loud reaffirmation of what has just occurred:

μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ποιῆσαι ἔτι ἰσχὸν ἐν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ κράτος κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, καθὰ καὶ σήμερον ἐποίησε. God, our God, is with us, to shew his power yet in Israel, and his power against the enemies, as he had done this day. [Jdt 13:11b]

Note the inclusion:

A ἡμῶν

B ὁ Θεός

B ὁ Θεός

A ἡμῶν

The ordering of these words in this sequence would make it easy to remember in an oral environment. However, there is yet more to consider here: The repetition of the genitive ἡμῶν 'our' shows an intimate relationship between the two parties. The audience has an identity; they belong to their deity.

On hearing Judith's raised voice, the people of Bethulia hurry towards the gate bringing the elders with them. The narrative makes it clear that a complete cross-section of the Jewish community gathers before Judith:

καὶ συνδραμον πάντες ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου, ὅτι παράδοξον ἦν αὐτοῖς τὸ ἐλθεῖν αὐτὴν, καὶ ἦνοιξαν τὴν πόλιν καὶ ὑπεδέξαντο αὐτὰς καὶ ἄπαντες πῦρ εἰς φάσιν περικύκλωσαν αὐτάς. And then they ran all together, both small and great, for it was strange unto them that she was come: so they opened the gate, and received them, and made a fire for a light, and stood round about them. [Jdt 13:13]

It is possible to conceive at this point of the performance (regardless of whether it is delivered via text or orality) that the audience would feel as though they were part of the crowd scene. In short, here is an opportunity for audience participation, support and acceptance, as regards the particular theology that is being portrayed.

The gate is opened, and a fire is lit. The fire would be important for illuminating the happy occasion clearly displaying Judith, her servant, the guards, the elders, and the

townsfolk all eager to hear what Judith has to say (Jdt 13:13). It is also assumed that if the text of LXX Judith was dependent on an oral precursor, the tale would have often been performed in the evening with a fire burning. This particular scene would obviously lend itself to such a treatment.

For a second time, Judith gives a precise and a loud verbal affirmation of what she has achieved with her deity's assistance:

αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεόν αἰνεῖτε αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεόν ὃς οὐκ ἀπέστησεν τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ ἀλλ' ἔθραυσε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν διὰ χειρὸς μου ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ. Praise God! Praise God, who hasn't taken his mercy away from the house of Israel! Rather, he has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night! [Jdt 13:14]

It is significant that the cycle of aorist imperatives is broken here as the action is moved away from individual and smaller group of characters (Judith, *Yahweh*, guards) to the crowd. The present imperative now surfaces with the words: 'praise God, praise, praise God' (αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεόν αἰνεῖτε αἰνεῖτε τὸν θεόν). So smaller actions by individuals are performed with speed; however, a slower more lasting response is expected from the crowd. This is the function of the present imperative. The question now is why should the crowd constantly praise their deity? The answer to this question is found in Judith 13:15–16.

Judith pulls the head of Holofernes out of the wallet and for a third time repeats her message of divine success:

ἰδοὺ ἡ κεφαλὴ Ὁλοφέρνηου ἀρχιστρατήγου δυνάμεως Ἀσσοῦρ, καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ κωνοπεῖον, ἐν ᾧ κατέκειτο ἐν ταῖς μέθαις αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν ὁ Κύριος ἐν χειρὶ θηλείας. Behold the head of Holofernes the commander of the army of Assur. And look at the canopy wherein I slew him in his drunkenness and God struck him with the hand of a woman. [Jdt 13:15–16]

The visual impact that the exhibition of the prop (i.e. Holofernes's head), should have on the audience stands out. For effect there is a repetition of the word 'ἰδοὺ'. This speech (Jdt 13:15–16), is in effect a summary of the first half of Chapter 13:1–10. It depicts an oral delivery of what has just occurred.

For their part, the crowd then repeats the essence of the climax to the tale while praising their deity. It is also significant that the crowd seems to play the same role as a Greek chorus in this act:

καὶ ἐξέστη πᾶς ὁ λαὸς σφόδρα καὶ κύψαντες προσεκύνησαν τῷ Θεῷ καὶ εἶπαν ὁμοθυμαδόν· εὐλογητὸς εἶ, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, ὁ ἐξουδενώσας ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ σήμερον τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ λαοῦ σου. Then all the people were wonderfully astonished and bowed themselves and worshipped God, and said with one accord, Blessed be thou, O our God, which hast this day brought to nought the enemies of thy people.

Analysis

Audience participation

Scene 1 is centred on the tent of Holofernes (Jdt 13:1–10). From the perspective of the reader, the tent may be imagined as a theatrical stage or *skene*. The written description

indicates a structure with a back wall and side walls. There is no front wall as the audience is allowed to 'secretly' witness what transpires within the tent. Thus, the audience is the fourth wall.

The notion of the fourth wall was made famous by the philosopher and critic Denis Diderot (1713–1784) (Stevenson 1995:4–5). The fourth wall extends the idea of an imaginary boundary between any fictional work and its audience. Although most modern drama usually shies away from acknowledging the audience (with the possible exception of holding for laughs), the fourth wall was frequently broken in Elizabethan and Restoration drama. Actors in Shakespeare's day would run through the audience (often chasing other actors onto the stage), make various asides and jokes to the audience personally and usually at the expense of the other actors on stage (cf. Hattaway 1982:18, 146, 148, 150, 157, 173; and March 2014:72–83).

With this concept in mind, LXX Judith seems to anticipate the more modern concept of breaking the fourth wall. The text encourages the reader or hearer to become part of the action – this is, in itself, possible evidence of orality.

It is accepted that an appropriately written dramatic work, whether transmitted through reading or an oral presentation, by means of its performative qualities, has the potential to achieve immediacy. Here, the audience may become captivated with its own familiarity and memory of popular, communally shared narratives. On this issue, Weimann and Bruster (2008), with reference to Skura (1993:237 n 5), confirm that:

The resulting shock of recognition, the turmoil of desire, anxiety, or relaxation is inseparable from the felt commotion of fact and fiction, whereby the 'audience's response thus becomes part of the play'. As far as this response exceeds the audience's own conventional role, the participation of spectators is mobilised on the existential plane of their ongoing, nervous, moment-to-moment engagement with what is staged in front of them. (pp. 82–83)

Here, the audience for an oral performance would no longer feel as if they were behind a fourth wall. Here we seem to have a suggestion of audience participation and their buy-in. Even though we only have a written version, the audience would still feel involved personally. For example, in Judith 13:13, it is possible for the audience to feel that they are also part of the Jewish crowd drawn to the voice of Judith. The implied audience becomes part of the scene and the imaginary fourth wall collapses. A complete cross section of the Jewish community (from lowly to great) is described as buying into the import of maintaining righteousness in their deity's eyes and acknowledging his accomplishment by virtue of Judith's righteous behaviour. Accordingly, they praise their deity repeatedly (13:17, 13:20). A correctly primed audience may well become embroiled with this powerful suggestion. Later, this motif is again revisited when a non-Jew (Achior) is portrayed as being so enthralled by the oral retelling of

Judith's feat that he faints, circumcises himself and converts to Judaism (cf. Jdt 14:5–10).

The overriding evidence that this text is based on an oral precursor becomes almost self-explanatory in Judith 13:11–20. Here is an actual description of a spokesperson addressing a group of people orally. Indeed, Judith 13:12–20 describes a person delivering an oral presentation much like a Greek bard. This should be viewed as significant as the written narrative describes a Jewish storyteller in action. Furthermore, it describes a storyteller recounting an action that is also part of the written narrative.

Important theatrical props

The text emphasises that, apart from the central characters, all events and actions are clearly dependent on the structure and layout of the scenes depicted plus primary accoutrements. Thus, in Scene 1, the audience is made very aware of the following items:

- Oil lamp
- Non-kosher wine
- Kosher wine and food
- Bed
- Bed post
- Canopy
- Sword
- Holofernes' head
- Wallet

In sharp contradistinction, Scene 2 deals solely with events before the gates of Bethulia (Jdt 13:11–20). Here, again, apart from the guards, Judith, her servant, and a crowd of people, certain props are crucial for the success of the message:

- Gates
- Fire
- Crowd
- Wallet
- Holofernes' head
- Canopy

The employment of the senses

This narrative enhances the drama of the various acts within a particular scene by exploiting certain of the bodily senses. Of particular importance are visual and audial cues but even the sense of smelling and feeling the fire is implied on occasion. When this tale is read as a story, obviously the audience hear what is being read. However, the text also implies the use of the senses by the characters in the narrative. The employment of the senses fills the audience with anticipation of what might happen. This is notwithstanding the fact that the Jewish audience most likely already know the outcome of the narrative. If so, they would have looked forward to the ironic and humorous episodes and knowingly shared in the laughter as they witnessed their enemies being ridiculed.

Obviously, humour assists greatly in keeping any story interesting. However, humour also has an important didactic

function – especially in assisting to impart memorable cultural values to the youth. Indeed, assuming that an oral presentation would (on occasion) be made to a cross-section of the community, certain of the youth might only be hearing the tale for the first time. Here, the question of whether a narrative creates a culture or whether it is produced by a culture becomes paramount. Clearly, both points of view are true.

Dramatic irony

The narrative is replete with dramatic irony. Indeed, the entire book's message is based on an ironic situation. Nebuchadnezzar considers himself to be a god and seeks to dominate the people who are in covenant with a superior deity. Even after he is warned of the futility of his attempts to oppress the Jews, he still seeks to dominate them and ultimately loses his army.

Holofernes – the agent of Nebuchadnezzar and antithesis of Judith – seeks to dominate and have sexual relations with Judith. Instead, he is totally emasculated by her. Indeed, his beheading may even be viewed as a symbolic castration. Holofernes' head, which features in the climax of this book at 13:8, is also later employed as a dramatic prop. This fits in with what might actually occur should a storyteller or bard want to exemplify an aspect of a narrative (13:15). This repeated display of the head also serves as a powerful echo of the original climax. It is directly reminiscent to the beheading scene in 13:8.

A reference to a Hellenistic Chorus?

The crowd scene in 13:12–20 suggests the role of a chorus. Plays of the ancient Greek theatre always included a chorus that offered a variety of background and summary information to help the audience follow the performance. A Jewish reader or listening audience, identifying with the crowd might well unconsciously affirm the message proclaimed by the crowd. Also, Uzziah confirms and amplifies the righteous status of Judith and corroborates that it was the Jewish deity that guided Judith to cut off the head of their enemy's leader (Jdt 13:18).

Conclusion

Evidence of orality

The focus of the book of Judith seems to be to emphasise that the Jewish deity required his children to continually be observant and faithful to his Law. The message supports the concept that righteousness is the key to obtaining his protection.

By their very nature, oral narratives have to embody the dramatic. A storyteller will naturally make use of body language, mimetic gestures, pithy memorable sayings, formulaic sayings, mime and props. The written text clearly refers to these qualities.

Judith not only makes use of similar ironies contained in other traditional texts (intertextuality) it also contains an

element of playful humour. We also witness an excellent example of traditional Jewish literature portraying its enemies as being foolish and acting in compromising ways.

Given the strong mimetic and dramatic qualities found in Judith, we are led to confirm the assumption that before LXX Judith became a fixed, written text, the basic fabula might well have been part of an oral tradition.

The didactic function of LXX Judith

The purpose of the tale is confirmed. The narrative offers hope for oppressed people. Through a performative medium, they are encouraged to buy in to the notion that sanctification and accompanying divine empowerment occurs when something is set apart, albeit for the correct reasons.

Here the emphasis is on righteous action and not benign lip service to a higher authority. Thus, duly armed with righteous behaviour, and replete with the assurance of divine approval, even the profane may become sanctified. For example, the sword of Holofernes, as the symbol of ultimate profanity and blasphemy, is employed by the righteous Judith as an instrument of holiness when it beheads Holofernes – thus revealing the power of the Jewish deity through the hands of a righteous woman.

The employment of a female (Judith) is quite deliberate, emphasising that anyone (man, woman or child) has the ability to be righteous. Hence, because of the power of their deity, even the perceived physical impediment of having the body of a woman is overcome by righteous conduct. Here, it is suggested, that Judith's beauty is also a reflection of her internal character. Accordingly, a righteous woman – and by extension the entire Jewish nation – is portrayed as having the divine assurance to overcome oppression, represented by the might of the Assyrian Empire.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

N.P.L.A. and P.J.J. shared the responsibility in creating this article. In this context N.P.L.A. focused on the historical and narratological issues whereas P.J.J. was more concerned with analysing the Greek text and methodological considerations.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References

- Allen, N.P.L., 2016, 'Judith: Embodying holiness in a G-dless space', in P.J. Jordaán & H. Efthymiades-Keith (eds.), *Body, psyche and space in Old Testament apocryphal literature*, pp. 17–44, Biblisch Notizen, Neue Folge, Herder, Freiburg.
- Allen, N.P.L. & Jordaán, P.J., 2020, 'Reading LXX Judith 13:1–9 as performance', *HTS Theological Studies* 76(4), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6167>
- Bartholomew, J., 2010, 'The role of Judith in Margaret Fell's women speaking justified', in K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti & H. Lähnemann (eds.), *The sword of Judith: Judith studies across the disciplines*, pp. 259–270, Open Book, Cambridge.
- Bartók, B. & Lord, A.B., 1951, *Serbo-Croatian folk songs: Texts and transcriptions of seventy-five folk songs from the Milman Parry collection and a morphology of Serbo-Croatian folk melodies*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY.
- Bernardini, P., 2010, 'Judith in the Italian unification process, 1800–1900', in K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti & H. Lähnemann (eds.), *The Sword of Judith: Judith studies across the disciplines*, pp. 397–409, Open Book, Cambridge.
- Branch, R.G. & Jordaán, P.J., 2009, 'The significance of secondary characters in Susanna, Judith, and the additions to Esther in the Septuagint', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20(1), 389–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10226486.2009.12128803>
- Bruns, J.E., 1954, 'Judith or Jael?', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16(1), 12–14.
- Burzlauff, M.C., 2006, 'Chaste sexual warrior, civic heroine, and femme fatale: Three views of Judith in Italian Renaissance and Baroque art', M.A. dissertation, Georgetown University College of Arts & Sciences, Washington, DC.
- Ciletti, E., 2010, 'Judith imagery as Catholic Orthodoxy in counter-reformation Italy', in K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti & H. Lähnemann (eds.), *The sword of Judith: Judith studies across the disciplines*, pp. 345–368, Open Book, Cambridge.
- Coleman, N.D., 1932, 'Judith', in C. Gore, H.L. Goudge & A. Guillaume (eds.), *A new commentary on holy scripture including the Apocrypha*, pp. 58–62, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London.
- Edwards, C.L., 1983, 'The Parry-Lord theory meets operational structuralism', *The Journal of American Folklore* 96(380), 151–169. <https://doi.org/10.2307/540290>
- Esler, P.F., 2002, 'Ludic history in the book of Judith: The reinvention of Israelite identity?', *Biblical Interpretation* 10(2), 107–143. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851502760162780>
- Gash, J., 2015, 'Counter-reformation countenances: Catholic art and attitude from Caravaggio to Rubens', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 104(416), 373–387.
- Harness, K., 2010, 'Judith, music, and female patrons in early modern Italy', in K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti & H. Lähnemann (eds.), *The sword of Judith: Judith studies across the disciplines*, pp. 371–383, Open Book, Cambridge.
- Hattaway, M., 1982, *Elizabethan popular theatre: Plays in performance*, Theatre Production Series, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Johnson, M., 1987, *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Kleiner, F.S., 2019, *Gardner's art through the ages: A global history*, 16th edn., Cengage Learning, Boston, MA.
- Kubiak, R.J., 1965, 'The iconography of Judith in Italian Renaissance art', M.A. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.
- Kugel, J., 2018, 'On the bible and literary criticism', *Prooftexts* 1(3), 217–236.
- March, F., 2014, 'Shakespeare at the Avignon festival: Breaking down the walls', *Litteraria Pragensia* 24(47), 72–83.
- Marsh, D., 2010, 'Judith in Baroque Oratorio', in K.R. Brine, E. Ciletti & H. Lähnemann (eds.), *The sword of Judith: Judith studies across the disciplines*, pp. 385–396, Open Book, Cambridge.
- Nathan, G., 2007, 'Phonology', in D. Geeraerts & H. Cuyckens (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics*, pp. 611–631, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Nickelsburg, G.W.E., 2005, *Jewish literature between the bible and the Mishnah: A historical and literary introduction*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Parry, M., 1971, *The making of Homeric verse: The collected papers of Milman Parry*, A. Parry (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Perry, P.S., 2016, *Insights from performance criticism*, Reading the bible in the 21st century: Insights, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Propp, V.Y., 1968, *Morphology of the folktales*, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX.
- Ringgren, H., 1949, 'Oral and written transmission in the O.T.', *Studia Theologica* 3(1), 34–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393384908599679>

- Russell, D.A., 1980, 'De Imitatione', in D. West & A. Woodman (eds.), *Creative imitation and Latin literature*, pp. 1–16, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sale, M., 1996, 'In defense of Milman Parry: Renewing the oral theory', *Oral Tradition* 11(2), 374–417.
- Skura, M.A., 1993, *Shakespeare the actor and the purpose of playing*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Stevenson, J., 1995, 'The fourth wall and the third space', *Centre for Playback Theatre* (Spring 1995), 1–9, viewed 27 October 2022, from http://www.playbacktheatre.org/playbacktheatre/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Stevenson_Fourth.pdf.
- Steyn, G.J., 2008, 'Beautiful but tough': A comparison of LXX Esther, Judith and Susanna', *Journal for Semitics* 17(1), 156–181.
- Van Seters, J., 2000, 'Creative imitation in the Hebrew Bible', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 29(4), 395–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000842980002900401>
- Venter, P.M., 2011, 'The function of the Ammonite Achior in the book of Judith', *HTS Theological Studies* 67(3), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i3.1101>
- Weimann, R. & Bruster, D., 2008, *Shakespeare and the power of performance: Stage and page in the Elizabethan Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wills, L.M., 2019, *Judith*, Hermeneia, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.
- Wills, L.M., 2021, *Introduction to the Apocrypha Jewish books in Christian bibles*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.